United Nations A/56/680–S/2001/1155

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
6 December 2001
English
Original: French

General Assembly
Fifty-sixth session
Agenda item 75 (a)
Review and implementation of the Concluding Document of the Twelfth Special Session of the General Assembly: regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

Security Council
Fifty-sixth year

Letter dated 4 December 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the report of the subregional conference on the protection of women and children in armed conflict in central Africa, held at Kinshasa from 14 to 16 November 2001 and organized by the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa (see annex).

The conclusions of that meeting will no doubt help the States concerned understand and find short and long term solutions to the crucial problem of armed conflict which affects millions of women and children in that region each year.

This contribution and ongoing attention to this problem will relieve the States of the central African region which is already facing poverty.

I should be most grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 75 (a), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Atoki **Ileka**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 4 December 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Report of the Subregional Conference on the Protection of Women and Children in Armed Conflict in Central Africa

Kinshasa, 14-16 November 2001

I. Introduction

The Subregional Conference on the Protection of Women and Children in Armed Conflict in Central Africa was held in Kinshasa from 14 to 16 November 2001 under the auspices of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa.

The decision to organize the conference was taken by the Ministers of member countries of the Committee at their fourteenth meeting, which took place in Bujumbura in August 2000. The decision was based on the finding that women and children endured indescribable suffering in situations of armed conflict in Central Africa and the need to afford them appropriate protection.

The following countries participated in the conference: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe. Rwanda did not attend.

The conference brought together senior officials from Governments, international organizations and representatives of civil society and it led to an in-depth, frank and direct exchange of views on the adverse repercussions of armed conflict on the situation of women and children in central Africa and on the measures to be taken to ease the suffering of these vulnerable groups.

The participants shared their thoughts and held discussions on these sensitive issues and also heard statements delivered by experts whose services the Committee secretariat had enlisted because of their competence and experience of the issues under consideration. They included:

- Ms. Elise Loum Ndoadoumgue Neloumsei, consultant to the Advisory Committee;
- Ms. Françoise Mianda, legal adviser and coordinator of the technical cooperation unit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Kinshasa;
- Ms. Rose Nlangu Mpisi, research coordinator at the Centre for Gender Studies of the University of Pretoria;
- Ms. Paule Bouvier, emeritus professor at the Free University of Brussels;
- Ms. Carole Baudouin, programme officer of the UNICEF child protection programme in the Democratic Republic of the Congo;
- Mr. Jean-Jacques Purusi Sadiki, associate coordinator of the peace programme of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa.

The Conference secretariat was composed of Ms. Pamela Maponga, secretary of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, Ms. Nicole Moran and Mr. Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh.

His Excellency Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, presided over the opening ceremony which featured:

- words of welcome from H.E. Mr. Léonard She Okitundu;
- a message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, read by Mr. Bouri Sanhouidi, UNDP resident coordinator in the Democratic Republic of the Congo;
- a statement by Colonel Gustave Zoula, representative of the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity;

– an opening speech by Mrs. Jeanne Ebamba, Minister for Foreign, Social and Family Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

These speeches provided inspiration to the participants in the discussions. Participants decided to entrust the Bureau of the Advisory Committee with the task of directing their work. The conference was therefore presided over by Ambassador Mboladinga Katako of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Mr. Sylvain Bayalama of the Republic of the Congo was rapporteur.

The Conference dealt with the following topics:

Topic 1 — Analysis of recent or ongoing armed conflicts in central Africa and their impact on the situation of women and children, presented by Mr. Jean-Jacques Purusi Sadiki;

Topic 2 — Legal framework and international efforts to protect women and children in situations of armed conflict, presented by Ms. Françoise Mianda;

Topic 3 — The role of women and children in conflicts and peace efforts in central Africa, presented by Ms. Elise Loum Ndoadoumgue Neloumsei;

Topic 4 — Problems specific to women in armed conflicts, presented by Ms. Rose Nlangu Mpisi;

Topic 5 — Problems specific to children in armed conflicts, presented by Ms. Paule Bouvier and Ms. Carole Baudouin;

Presentation of the **draft plan of action for the protection of women and children in armed conflicts in central Africa** by Ms. Elise Loum Ndoadoumgue Neloumsei.

II. Progress of work at the Conference

In accordance with the methodology proposed by the organizers, the Kinshasa Conference generated high-level communications submitted by the eminent guest experts, followed by dynamic and constructive discussions with the active participation of representatives of Governments, international organizations and civil society, which culminated in pertinent recommendations for specific measures to deal with the suffering of women and children in armed conflict situations in central Africa.

A. During the discussion on **topic 1 (Analysis of recent or ongoing armed conflicts in central Africa and their impact on the situation of women and children)**, the participants were presented with a historical overview of the conflicts which are ravaging central Africa, particularly the Great Lakes region. It was noted that bloody confrontations between various ethnic groups which are sometimes very closely related have occurred cyclically in the subregion since the pre-colonial period.

The participants deplored the proliferation of armed conflicts in central Africa, which involved six of the 11 countries in the subregion, and also the disastrous impact they have on the welfare and economic development of the peoples of central Africa, particularly women and children. Two main types of conflict were identified: civil wars and wars of aggression. The causes of these incessant conflicts were identified as, inter alia, struggles for power and for control of resources, poor governance, economic interests, ethnic or political intolerance, the refusal to abide by democratic principles, poverty, underdevelopment, overpopulation and the actions of foreign powers and multinationals.

With regard to the impact of these conflicts on women, it was noted that women suffered as a result of interruptions of production activities, separation from their families, increased maternal mortality, sexual assault, HIV/AIDS infection, physical violence (murder, torture, battery), landmine accidents, arbitrary arrest and abduction.

The participants noted that children suffered as a result of separation from their families, abandonment, deportation, the discontinuation of schooling, forced labour in mines and on plantations, torture, massacres, abductions, various traumas, sexual and emotional abuse, enrolment as child soldiers and HIV/AIDS infection.

The participants made the following recommendations:

– That the culture of impunity for the perpetrators of war crimes be brought to an end, in particular by setting up international criminal courts in the countries where the crimes were committed;

– That women, who constitute the majority of the population and the driving force for development

in the subregion, be involved in conflict resolution processes;

- That there be a return to certain traditional values in conflict resolution;
- That strategies be put in place to combat poverty;
- That small arms collection programmes be implemented;
- That awareness be raised in arms-producing countries of the need for a more responsible attitude to the transfer of arms into conflict zones;
- That programmes on peace education and respect for human rights be established;
- That awareness be raised about the particular difficulties experienced by women and children and about a spirit of tolerance and acceptance of differences;
- That a children's parliament be set up which would allow children in the subregion to meet in order to share and discuss the specific problems they face in peacetime or in wartime;
- That children be encouraged to participate directly in subregional conferences and meetings dealing with children's problems;
- That youth programmes and support funds be set up and developed;
- That the role of women in decision-making processes in the countries of the subregion be expanded and that women have access to a greater number of senior posts;
- That sociocultural initiatives be developed as part of the enhancement of women's capacities in conflict resolution;
- That civil society and traditional chiefs play a greater role in conflict resolution processes;
- That corridors of peace be created in conflict zones to bring aid and assistance to women and children.

B. Under **topic 2**, entitled "**Legal framework and international efforts to protect women and children in situations of armed conflict**", the Conference reviewed the international and regional legal instruments guaranteeing the protection of women and children in armed conflict situations, from general protection instruments to instruments on special protection for women and children.

Among the legal instruments cited were the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter of Human and People's Rights, and national laws.

These instruments advocate, in particular, respect for life and physical and moral integrity, special assistance and care, family reunion, education, exemption from the death penalty and prohibition of the enlistment of children into the army. They prohibit coercion, physical abuse, torture, rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault. It was noted that they establish a distinction between combatants and civilians and prohibit attacks on the latter.

The Conference also discussed other international efforts to protect women and children in armed conflicts, including the various resolutions acopted by the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, the specific programmes of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, the contribution made by peacekeeping operations and humanitarian associations, the creation of international criminal courts, the special investigation procedures of the Commission on Human Rights, etc.

The participants expressed deep concern at the increasing number of violations of the basic rights of women and children in armed conflicts, at a time when the number of treaties and other instruments guaranteeing their protection was increasing. In that regard, they drew up the following recommendations:

- That the central African countries which have not already done so sign and ratify the international instruments relating to international humanitarian law and human rights protection;
- That national laws guaranteeing the protection of women and children be strengthened;
- That the countries of the subregion implement effectively the international conventions and laws

guaranteeing the protection of women and children in situations of armed conflict;

- That women be encouraged to participate in the political life of their country;
- That the teaching of international humanitarian law and human rights be extended to all levels of the education system;
- That the international conventions relating to the protection of refugees and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement be respected.

C. Under **topic 3**, entitled "**The role of women and children in conflicts and peace efforts in central Africa**", the participants considered the particular difficulties faced by those vulnerable groups in armed conflict situations. It was found that African women already bore the main responsibility for running the household and organizing the family in peacetime and that armed conflict situations increased that responsibility and made it more difficult to exercise. Most of the time, women become head of the family and have to provide for their children. In order to do that, they are exposed to the worst dangers — that of being mutilated by mines, raped or killed when they go into the fields, or that of being forced to resort to prostitution, with the concomitant risk of HIV/AIDS infection.

The participants recognized the positive role that women and young people can play in the settlement of armed conflicts. As the main victims of such conflicts, these vulnerable groups are actually in the best position to know about the horrors of war and the value of peace. The Conference welcomed the many initiatives taken by women, through women's associations and other groups, to promote peace and conflict resolution in central Africa.

The Conference made the following recommendations:

- That women and young people play a greater role in conflict resolution processes and peace agreements;
- That women and children play a greater role in conflict prevention;
- That programmes be put in place to promote the culture of peace among young children;
- That intermixing of children be promoted at national level to combat tribalism and ethnic intolerance;
- That women's associations be set up to promote peace in the countries of the subregion;
- That a subregional women's consultation committee be established;
- That African women's peace marches be organized;
- That rehabilitation centres be set up for women and children who have suffered the ravages of war;
- That a network of women's associations be created to promote peace in central Africa.

D. Under **topic 4**, entitled "**Problems specific to women in armed conflicts**", the participants reviewed the impact of armed conflicts on women in central Africa. In particular, they stated their deep concern at the proliferation of acts of violence and atrocities committed against women in countries racked by armed conflicts. It was found that, because of their status, women are subjected to such things as sexual assault, massacres and aggression of all kinds (murder, torture, abortion, unwanted pregnancy, mutilation caused by mines, arbitrary arrest, deliberate HIV/AIDS infection by combatants, systematic and gang rape — when on their way to the fields, on the road to exile or in refugee camps), loss of their property and displacement.

The participants also deplored the vulnerability of women in situations of armed conflicts, where they are forced into prostitution in order to survive and to provide for their children. The participants recognized that wars in Africa have led to an increase in violence against women and have worsened their socio-economic circumstances. Women and children make up the vast majority of refugees and displaced persons, and this makes them more vulnerable and means that they are exposed to a full range of dangers.

The participants made the following recommendations:

- That women be included in peace negotiations in order to take their concerns and specific problems better into account;

- That the armed forces operating in the subregion be made aware of the need to observe the various international legal instruments concerning protection of women and children in armed conflict;

- That women from various African countries cooperate in order to share experiences and information useful to their work;

- That the capacity of women to contribute to the peaceful settlement of disputes be strengthened.

E. Under **topic 5** entitled "**Problems specific to children in armed conflict**", participants lamented the fact that children and women were the main victims of the armed conflicts ravaging central Africa. They pointed out that children and women accounted for the bulk of refugees and displaced persons and were exposed to various types of risk. The suffering of children in situations of armed conflict were identified as follows: malnutrition, undernourishment, premature entry into the workforce, separation from family, abandonment, deportation, abduction, end of schooling, forced labour in mines and plantations, torture, massacre, various forms of trauma, sexual violence and emotional abuse, enlistment as child soldiers, HIV/AIDS infection and mutilation by land mines. The specific situation of girl soldiers who were often subjected to sexual abuse and exposed to disease was also emphasized.

The participants made the following recommendations:

- That demobilization and reintegration programmes aimed at child soldiers be launched in the countries of central Africa affected by conflicts;

- That support programmes for street children be created and developed in order to prevent their being recruited as child soldiers;

- That a parliament for children be created in each country of the subregion with the objective of encouraging them to participate in the search for peace and facilitating the future establishment of a subregional parliament;

- That exchanges and discussions be encouraged within those parliaments, on the specific problems facing children in time of peace and in time of war;

- That the countries of central Africa be encouraged to refrain from recruiting children into their armed forces, and encouraged to demobilize and reintegrate those already involved as child soldiers;

- That children's living conditions be improved in order to prevent them from being conscripted by warring factions;

- That education programmes on a culture of peace and respect for human rights be set up;

- That the establishment of a parliament for children be encouraged so as to enable children of the subregion to meet in order to exchange views and to discuss the specific problems they face in time of peace and in time of war;

- That direct participation of children in subregional conferences and meetings on topics concerning the problems of children be promoted;

- That programmes and funds to support young persons be created and developed;

- That young persons be mobilized and included in all activities relating to the prevention of armed conflict;

- That corridors of peace be created in conflict zones to bring aid and assistance to women and children;

- That a special solidarity fund be created for the protection of women and children in situations of armed conflict in the subregion.

Participants ended by adopting a plan of action (annex I) on the protection of women and children in situations of armed conflict in central Africa, which outlines a range of measures to be taken at the national, subregional and international levels in order to find lasting solutions for the untold suffering of women and children in situations of armed conflict in central Africa.

Women participating in the Conference met to decide on the establishment of a think-tank which would set up a subregional women's network for the promotion of peace and prevention of conflicts. They launched an impassioned appeal to the member countries of the Committee to stop the fighting in the subregion and particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (annex II).

The participants also welcomed the constructive atmosphere that prevailed throughout their deliberations and expressed their gratitude to the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, H.E. Major-General Joseph Kabila, the Congolese Government and people for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to them throughout their stay in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Kinshasa, 16 November 2001

Annex I

Plan of action

Preamble

The participants at the subregional Conference on the Protection of Women and Children in Armed Conflict in Central Africa held at Kinshasa from 14 to 16 November 2001,

Taking into account all the legal instruments concerning the protection of women and children in armed conflict,

Gravely concerned by the proliferation and persistence of armed conflicts in recent years and their disastrous consequences on the women and children of Africa in general, and in the subregion of central Africa in particular,

Filled with consternation at the appalling number of women and children victims of these armed conflicts,

Condemning the involvement and mobilization of women and children in armed conflicts,

Concerned by the proliferation and illicit circulation of arms in the conflict areas,

Considering the scale of the displacement of women and children during and after armed conflicts,

Conscious of the important role of women and young persons in the prevention, management and settlement of conflicts,

Considering General Assembly resolution 48/157 of 20 December 1993 on the protection of children affected by armed conflicts,

Recalling Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000 on women, peace and security and the Statement by the President of the Security Council on women, peace and security of 31 October 2001 (S/PRST/2001/31),

Taking into account the persistence of conflicts in the subregion and considering the vulnerability of women and children and the need to ensure specific and appropriate protection to those groups,

Recommend:

At the national level

- That existing democratic principles be consolidated;
- That policies promoting the rule of law and democracy, good governance, the culture of peace and non-violence be elaborated, adopted and implemented;
- That a code of ethics be established in order to combat the culture of impunity which is infiltrating society at all levels;
- That efforts to systematically assess the characteristics and causes of conflicts be intensified and that their impact on women and children be identified;

- That training programmes on human rights and international humanitarian law be set up in order to raise awareness among educators, the judiciary, police and the army on the harmful consequences of war;

- That the warring parties be encouraged to protect the functioning of primary health-care services and drinking water supply;

- That multisectoral and multidisciplinary mechanisms be established to provide care in cases of sexual violence against women and children;

- That a dynamic relationship be established among women, youth, children and the community and medical personnel in conflict areas in order to evaluate the specific needs for food and care as well as follow-up strategies to which they can turn;

- That family planning and services related to STDs and HIV/AIDS be integrated into reproductive health-care services;

- That women and children be protected from sexual violence and exploitation and that social health and psychological-emotional care be organized for women and children rape victims;

- That sound educational activities be initiated in refugee and displaced persons camps for children and youth and ensure their effective participation in such activities;

- That the destroyed personalities of women and children be rebuilt;

- That programmes for psycho-social reintegration be geared towards the mobilization of community mutual assistance networks to support the process of recovery and restoration of a climate of normality;

- That open houses be held to showcase the activities of youth and women's organizations in the area of conflict prevention, management and resolution;

- That women's and children's organizations be involved in national mediation;

- That strategies or specific activities be initiated and developed to encourage the effective involvement of women and youth in transforming conflict and seeking and establishing peace in the subregion;

- That local structures be reinvigorated in order to channel the aspirations of women for better social, economic and political conditions;

- That the services of women in grass-roots communities be enlisted so that they may play a role in the consolidation of peace;

- That the needs of displaced or refugee women and children be identified and that they be provided with appropriate resources;

- That the decentralization process be strengthened through such accompanying measures as the involvement of civil society;

- That a political and legal framework be established that is conducive to a dialogue among the State, traditional chiefs and civil society;

- That training programmes in negotiation and conflict-resolution techniques be strengthened; that certain traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution be restored and strengthened;

- That the capacity of civil society be strengthened, in particular that of women's and youth organizations which are currently making commendable efforts in the area of conflict prevention, management and resolution;

- That the emergence of a new elite concerned for the common good be encouraged by promoting civic education aimed at youth;

- That a special solidarity fund be created for the protection of women and children in situations of armed conflict;

- That the establishment of a children's parliament be encouraged.

At the subregional level

- That efforts be made to combat the proliferation and illicit circulation of weapons throughout the countries of the subregion;

- That steps be taken to strengthen the capacity of States in conflict prevention, management and resolution through regional and subregional institutions, in particular OAU/African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States and the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa;

- That a committee be set up to look into the design and establishment of traditional mechanisms for the prevention and peaceful settlement of conflicts within the community of Central African States;

- That steps be taken to support the establishment of a network for coordination and exchange among women's organizations working for peace and security in central Africa;

- That women's and children's organizations or networks in central Africa be encouraged to combine their efforts with view to strengthening their responsibilities;

- That member countries of the subregion be encouraged to exchange experiences in the area of human rights, international humanitarian law and good governance;

- That true political will for subregional integration be demonstrated;

- That mechanisms be established and strengthened to punish those who violate the rights of women and children in armed conflict;

- That steps be taken to support and promote the establishment of a network for coordination and exchange among children's and women's organizations working for peace, security and human rights in central Africa;

- That the establishment of a children's parliament in the subregion be encouraged;

- That a solidarity fund be established for the protection of women and children victims of armed conflicts in the subregion.

At the international level

- That humanitarian and relief agencies be encouraged to develop responses which take into consideration the specific and alarming situation of women and youth in situations of armed conflict;
- That steps be taken to support the training programmes on human rights and international humanitarian law begun by Governments and/or civil society in the subregion;
- That sanctions to be imposed on member States responsible for flagrant violations of international law be targeted so that they do not penalize the civilian population;
- That all peacekeeping actions in States which have not yet experienced war be effectively supported;
- That steps be taken to define a framework for cooperation among the various networks for women and youth working for peace both on the continent and worldwide;
- That development partners be invited to support the implementation of this plan of action at every level.

Kinshasa, 16 November 2001

Annex II

Special motion

We, the women having participated in the Subregional Conference on the Protection of Women and Children in Armed Conflict in Central Africa, held at Kinshasa from 14 to 16 November 2001,

Launch an impassioned appeal to our fathers, husbands, brothers and sons, for enough of our blood has flowed, filling our ponds, streams and rivers, even polluting our earth:

May the cannon's roar cease in the subregion and especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo!

May our tears cease to fall from our eyes because of the multitude of atrocities we suffer daily!

May our children no longer be used as cannon fodder!

We women, who bring forth life in pain, refuse to lose it at any price.

We hold on to the hope that, beyond the selfish interests and misdeeds of war, the peace and harmony which we desire with all our hearts will soon be restored in our subregion:

That which women desire, God also desires; therefore,

God bless Central Africa!